

## **Families** (Deuteronomy 6:1-25)

Just last month an article was in a publication that is produced by Evangelical Alliance. The publication is called PQ, Parliamentary Questions which is a monthly update produced by the Public Affairs Department of the Evangelical Alliance. Of course it is written from a Christian perspective, and it seeks to provide its readers with information on and analysis of current political issues. The article in questions is entitled '**Breakdown Britain**' went

**On 11th December 2006 Iain Duncan Smith's Centre for Social Justice published its latest report 'Breakdown Britain'. The report covers the nature, extent and cause of social breakdown and poverty in Britain today. Policy recommendations to the Conservative Party are to follow in June 2007. The report identifies 'five pathways to poverty': family breakdown, educational failure, economic dependence, indebtedness and addiction.**

**In 1997 the Evangelical Alliance similarly published a report on social disintegration having surveyed 73 Christian action projects across the UK. The survey came to the same conclusions then as 'Breakdown Britain' has reached today: that the root causes of social breakdown lie with dysfunctional families and unemployment...**

**In October 2007 the Evangelical Alliance welcomed a speech to the Conservative Party conference by David Cameron in which he stressed the importance of marriage: "I will set a simple test for each and every one of our policies: does it help families?...I also believe that marriage is a great institution, and we should support it", Mr Cameron stated. Referring to this new report Cameron asked "If marriage rates went up, if divorce rates came down, if more couples stayed together longer, would our society be better off? My answer is yes". Certainly from an economic perspective Britain would be better off: the report concludes that family breakdown costs the country more than £20bn a year...**

**It is sad that the Alliance's report nine years ago and 'Breakdown Britain' come to similar conclusions about the causes of social disintegration and that little has seemingly changed. However, this report should be commended for encouraging a culture of marriage... (EA Parliamentary Questions December 2006)**

I have cut out some of the article for brevity and I am not running a party political broadcast on behalf of the Conservative Party, as neither are the Evangelical Alliance – they are just responding to the report produced by the Conservative Party at face value.

We do seem to live in a culture where family life is breaking down, where as the Evangelical Alliance say **the root causes of social breakdown lie with dysfunctional families and unemployment**. Dysfunctional families. It would be so easy this morning for us here to lay the blame at the door of single parent families, at the door of non-Christian families because of course Christian families are never dysfunctional! We could lay the blame at the feet of government which is of course what the Tory party are doing when they say elsewhere in their report **Breakdown Britain**

**..that the benefit system favours single parenthood; a married couple draws less in tax credits or benefits than if they lived apart... Marriage and old-fashioned Tory values is the headline draw of 'Breakdown Britain'. Underlying it all, however, seems to be Cameron's determination to revolutionise the tax credit and benefit system: to incentivise marriage. The Conservatives call the tax credit system "dependency" and accuse tax credits for causing poverty instead of providing a way out of destitution** (EA Parliamentary Questions December 2006)

So this morning, as we begin a New Year, we begin a new short series where we look at relationship, especially those that are connected with family. We shall be looking over the next three weeks at the titles: Families, Singles & Partners, Marriage & Faithfulness. This is before we go into the 40 Days of Purpose which will begin in earnest on 11 February and end on 01 April with a break in the middle for an All-Age Service on 04 March. Do come and do book up to come to the midweek meetings which begin on Wednesday 15 February here at church with a meal followed by an interactive Bible Study with input. And don't forget to order your book through Graham to go with the series.

But back to this morning, Families. We could look at discipline or at verses like those found in Ephesians 6

**"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother" —which is the first commandment with a promise— "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."** (Ephesians 6:1-4 NIV)

Or some of the many verses in Proverbs that deal with discipline. But that can be gained from books. That can be gained from a Care in the Family course, but this morning we are going to look at a different aspect to family life. How are we to behave as families? Let us read from another Old Testament passage – that of Deuteronomy 6, page 185

**"These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you."**

**"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates."** (Deuteronomy 6:1-9 NIV)

**“In the future, when your son asks you, “What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?” tell him: “We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders— great and terrible—upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.”” (Deuteronomy 6:20-25 NIV)**

What was it that families were encouraged to do in both passages that we read? They were encouraged to live out their Christian lives openly. This was in their community. They were to **tie them** (the commandments given to them by God) **as symbols on their hands and bind them on their foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of their houses and on their gates** (Deuteronomy 6:8-9)

We, sadly, live in a society that wants our love to God to be a secretive devotion, a purely private relationship which does not concern others. However God meant for our relationship with him to be something public, something that involves public confession.

When the man who is possessed by a legion, a thousand demons, is released from his possession we read that

**“As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”” (Mark 5:18-19 NIV)**

Jesus wanted the man to go and tell all his family what God had done for him. He was not to keep it private, keep it secretive, but tell everyone. A challenge to us all in 2007, as we are *Going For Growth*.

This challenge does not just begin at the garden gate outwards, but extends back into the house. Verse 4 of Deuteronomy 6

**“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-7 NIV)**

We are to impress the words of the Shema on our children. The Shema is the first word of verse 4 in Hebrew – the word *hear*. We are to impress on our children that we follow a God who is unique and that we are to love him with everything about us, with all of our being and everything we are and do.

We also need to talk to our children about our own relationship with God, verse 7

**“...Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” (Deuteronomy 6:7 NIV)**

And we are to talk about it at any and every opportunity. But what do some children of Christian parents hear? Do they hear when we go home from Church on Sunday morning over the lunch table a series of moans?

“Wasn’t the sermon awful today?”

“Do you know what Clarissa said to me? She gets right up my nose.”

“He made me so angry I nearly clocked him one. But in Christian love I just walked off. But I’m never speaking to him again”

And some children in Christian homes hear this week after week after week and then the parents wonder why the children get turned off church and Christianity and God. Sue and I had a rule that when our girls were growing up that we would never have negative talk about Church or Church folk over the meal table in front of the girls. It would be difficult at times, because we are all human and so we can upset each other get cross with someone – that is what being in a family is all about. But we sort out the differences and not allow them to fester, but that’s another sermon.

How often do we talk to our children about their relationship with God, about our relationship with God, about the Bible, or is it all left to the Sunday School teachers. It is their responsibility not mine. However children follow their parents lead in so many things and so parents have a great effect and if the Christianity of the parents or grandparents or uncles and aunts appears not to have any effect on them, then why should it on someone younger?

We need to be ready with answers. Deuteronomy 6:20

**“In the future, when your son or daughter asks you, “What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?” tell him: “We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders— great and terrible—upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.””**  
(Deuteronomy 6:20-25 NIV)

When asked questions, “Why do we do so-and-so?” Or “What goes on at so-and-so?” We need to give an answer. Here in Deuteronomy we have that God saved us

**“...”We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders— great and terrible—upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers.”** (Deuteronomy 6:21-23 NIV)

and God’s revelation to us

**“The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.”** (Deuteronomy 6:24-25 NIV)

Today our children might hear how

- I became a Christian,
- What God is teaching me in my Quiet Time, my personal time with God when I read a portion of the Bible and have a conversation with God in prayer
- What I am learning from Church with others
- The exciting things God is doing in my life
- The challenges that God is giving me
- Why I do or do not do certain things because I follow Jesus

Do we do that within families? One person said,

**‘the family that prays together stays together’** (Ray Brown in BST Message of Deuteronomy)

It is a bit hackneyed, and we might want to expand that but in times past family worship was an important event in the household, but is grace said before meals in some Christian household? Children bring books home from school and are read with parents – is the same happening with the Bible?

And just because I may not have any children, it lets me off the hook because as the family of God here everyone has a responsibility to talk to everyone else about their relationship with God and in this way the ones who are in the Sunday School at present will know that our Christianity is real.

And finally it points to, on this day of re-dedication, what some churches call ‘Covenant Sunday’ that we live out our Christians lives, both inside as well as outside the home. Those closest to us will know the reality of our Christianity by the way we live when in private with them. There are things we do within the home that we would not do outside the house – I will say no more. Do our families see us as real in the home or is our Christianity just for show.

If we are to **Talk about God when we sit at home and when we walk along the road, when we lie down and when we get up** (Deuteronomy 6:7) then we have to live it 24/7, at all times in all circumstance and this will happen when it is real. Do I read my Bible, do I pray, do I talk about what God is doing for and with me? Only I can answer that.

Am I a Christian in private as well as in public?

Let us begin our Going for Growth within our own families